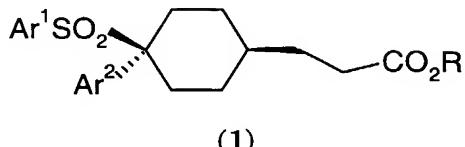


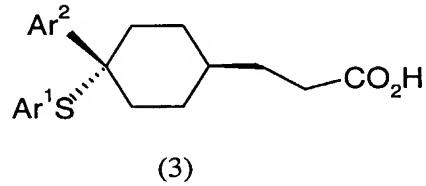
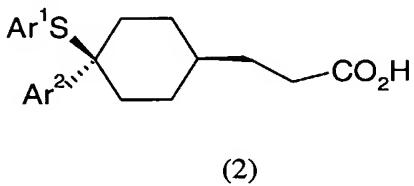
**CLAIMS:**

1. A process for the preparation of a compound of formula (1):



5 wherein R represents H or an alkali metal, Ar<sup>1</sup> represents 4-chlorophenyl and Ar<sup>2</sup> represents 2,5-difluorophenyl;  
comprising the steps of:

(a) stirring a mixture of a *cis*-sulfide of formula (2) and a *trans*-sulfide of formula (3):



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with 4-chlorobenzenethiol in an acidic medium in which said mixture of sulfides is partially soluble, causing preferential crystallisation of *cis*-sulfide of formula (2);

(b) collecting the *cis*-sulfide of formula (2);  
 15 (c) oxidising the *cis*-sulfide of formula (2) to the corresponding sulfone; and  
optionally  
 (d) neutralising the product of step (c) with alkali.

2. A process according to claim 1 wherein said acidic medium comprises an acid selected from trifluoroacetic acid and C<sub>1-4</sub>alkylsulfonic acids in which one or more of the carbon atoms may optionally be perfluorinated.

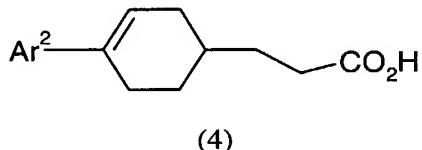
20 3. The process according to claim 2 wherein the acid is trifluoroacetic acid, trifluoromethanesulfonic acid or methanesulfonic acid.

25 4. A process according to claim 2 wherein said acidic medium additionally comprises a solvent selected from n-heptane, methylcyclohexane, trifluoroethanol,

hexafluorobenzene, trifluorotoluene, hexafluoropropan-2-ol, acetonitrile and mixtures thereof.

5. A process according to claim 1 wherein the acidic medium is methanesulfonic acid containing from about 5 to about 15 % water by volume.

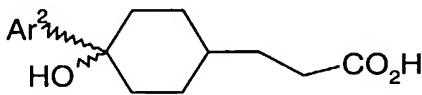
6. A process according to claim 1 wherein the mixture of *cis*-sulfide of formula (2) and *trans*-sulfide of formula (3) is generated by reaction of 4-chlorobenzenethiol with an olefin of formula (4):



wherein Ar<sup>2</sup> represents 2,5-difluorophenyl,  
said reaction being carried out in the acidic medium used in step (a) of the said process.

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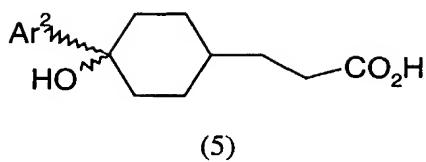
7. A process according to claim 1 wherein the mixture of *cis*-sulfide of formula (2) and *trans*-sulfide of formula (3) is generated by reaction of 4-chlorobenzenethiol with a carbinol of formula (5):



20  
wherein Ar<sup>2</sup> represents 2,5-difluorophenyl,  
said reaction being carried out in the presence of a Lewis acid, and the mixture of sulfides being isolated prior to carrying out step (a) of the said process.

25

8. A process according to claim 1 wherein the mixture of *cis*-sulfide of formula (2) and *trans*-sulfide of formula (3) is generated by reaction of 4-chlorobenzenethiol with a carbinol of formula (5):



wherein  $\text{Ar}^2$  represents 2,5-difluorophenyl,  
 said reaction being carried out in the acidic medium used in step (a) of the said  
 5 process.

9. A process according to claim 6 or claim 8 wherein the acidic medium  
 comprises an acid and hexafluoropropan-2-ol together with a co-solvent selected from  
 perfluorohexane and perfluorinated 2-butyltetrahydrofuran.

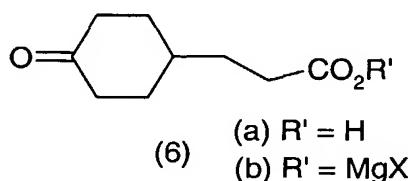
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10. A process according to claim 9 wherein the acid is trifluoromethanesulfonic  
 acid.

11. A process according to claim 6 or claim 8 wherein the acidic medium is  
 15 methanesulfonic acid containing from about 5 to about 15 % water by volume.

12. A process according to claim 7 or claim 8 wherein the carbinol of formula (5)  
 is prepared by:

(a) conversion of carboxylic acid (6a) to magnesium salt (6b):



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(b) reaction of (6b) with  $\text{Ar}^2\text{-M}'$ ; and

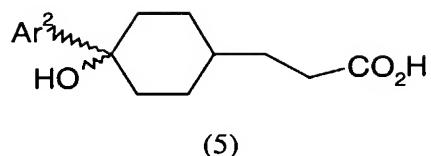
(c) treatment of the resulting product with acid;

wherein  $\text{M}'$  represents Li,  $\text{MgX}$  or  $\text{CeX}_2$ ;

$\text{X}$  represents Cl, Br or I; and

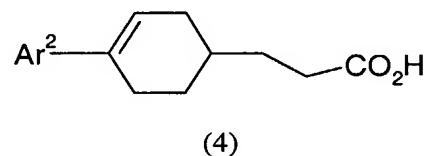
25  $\text{Ar}^2$  represents 2,5-difluorophenyl.

13. The compound of formula (5):



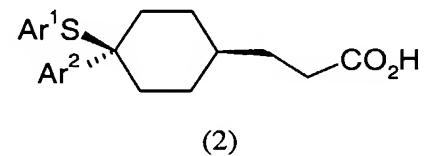
wherein  $\text{Ar}^2$  is 2,5-difluorophenyl.

5 14. The compound of formula (4):



wherein  $\text{Ar}^2$  is 2,5-difluorophenyl.

10 15. The compound of formula (2):



where  $\text{Ar}^1$  is 4-chlorophenyl and  $\text{Ar}^2$  is 2,5-difluorophenyl.